

WHAT IS ALL THE ROW IN WEST VIRGINIA? HERE IS A CALM SUMMING UP OF EVIDENCE

By Mary Boyle O'Reilly.

Charleston, W. Va., June 23.—The case of the United States government against the reign of King Coal in West Virginia has been carried to Washington.

The million words of evidence taken before the senate investigators at Charleston prove one fundamental fact. A West Virginia capitalist's ideal government is not republican freedom, but a so-called beneficent feudalism. Let us sum up the evidence as I heard it.

The United Mine Workers of America, 400,000 strong, contend that Kanawha county coal barons hold their employes as serfs and deny them the constitutional rights of free speech, free association and free assemblage.

The coal companies are consolidated in a giant combine.

That policy is justified. Kanawha coal fields find their market in New York, Chicago and Boston only through competing with mines in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Illinois. They are handicapped by a longer haul, and coal owners in neighboring states making it still harder by covertly encouraging the West Virginia strike. Obviously the Paint Creek coal companies must consolidate to prosper. But, organized themselves, they denied their miners the right of organization.

Paint and Cabin creeks are lonely ravines in the West Virginia hills. One railroad, whose interests are identified with the collieries, connects this wilderness with so-called civilization. For 23 miles the land is corporation property.

The vigorous population is all American, bred to arms and fearless of conflict.

During the strike of 1902 scores of blacklisted strikers came to the recently opened Creek mines. Four years later a long shut-out on Cabin Creek drove other scores of union men across the intervening mountains.

The tradition of Paint Creek is for union labor. It is as natural for a Paint Creek miner to agitate as for an Irishman to fight.

Intelligent, independent and courageous, they know their rights as men and citizens.

Coal barons have consistently plotted to undermine those rights. So much has been proven by the senate investigators.

Consider these facts:

Miners must live in company houses, there being none other to lease, nor land to buy. Vegetable gardens are rare. Some well-known

operators deny space for garden because it would "reduce the sale of vegetables at the company store."

Peddlers are not allowed on corporation land. The company's store is the only store—its prices always 20 per cent in excess of independent shops.

Blasting powder, dinner buckets and track hachets are 100 per cent higher than outside the district.

Installment contracts are known as leases and the mine owner stands to lose his household property if he moves away before the last dollar is paid.

Between monthly pay days miners borrow on their work, buying script at the company office. A man needing five dollars draws script for ten and sells it to an outside merchant for six dollars to raise ready cash. The merchant takes his chance of having his purchase redeemed by the company for seven dollars.

So the corporation and merchant profit by the miner's loss. This system is notorious and shameless.